

The prince of Denmark facing mass immigration – from Germany.

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How would Denmark react to a wave of mass immigration from Germany, numbering hundreds of thousands or millions of people? The question is, needless to say, purely hypothetical, but it is nevertheless, in my view, highly pertinent in the context of discussing the issues raised in Liav Orgad's important book, *The Cultural Defense of Nations*. These questions are at the very heart of Europe's present concerns and dilemmas, which makes the book's highly original, learned and well-argued contribution to the debate all the more valuable.

So – how would Denmark react to such a wave of immigration, and how, consistent with liberal-democratic norms, should it be expected to react in such case? As far as I understand, under the present European law German citizens have a right to move to Denmark, live and work there, enjoy various rights and in due course be entitled to naturalization; there is no numerical upper limit to this right. Naturally, the European Union is a union of states none of which is likely to produce vast numbers of people wishing, all of a sudden, to leave their country and settle in a neighbouring one. Had this not been the case, European countries would not, presumably, have been willing to limit their sovereignty in this respect, in order to allow the cross-border freedom of movement in Europe which is one of the great blessings of the Union (and which today appears to be in some jeopardy for reasons not irrelevant to the present discussion). If, God forbid, Germany were to provoke a mass exodus of its citizens with a plausible claim for asylum under the international humanitarian law, Denmark would be obligated to take these people in – under less generous terms, but, as far as I understand, in unlimited numbers. While any scenario of mass German immigration to Denmark is wildly implausible, our concern here is to examine this question from the Danish point of view. Is there a point at which it would be reasonable for Danes to wish to impose a limit of such immigration, and if so, on what grounds?

How would Denmark cope with this situation? First of all, it should be stressed that Denmark is surely capable of taking in and absorbing great numbers of German immigrants, and benefit a lot from this, in many respects. It can accept and successfully integrate Germans in numbers that are probably much higher than what many parochial people among the Danes would be capable of imagining. Up to a certain point, surely, this would be a great blessing for Denmark, serving its (broadly understood) national interests. While some narrow-minded people would, no doubt, object and grumble, good liberals and good Europeans in Denmark would be quite justified in overruling such objections.

The Danish economy would surely prosper as a result; many of the immigrants would, naturally, be well-educated and hard-working, a great boon for the economy and not at all a burden on the Danish welfare state. There would be no need to educate the newcomers as to the Danish norms of individual, and especially sexual, freedom and gender equality. Female German immigrants would not, presumably, be dressed in a way an average Dane would find objectionable in any way. No serious threat of German terrorism in Denmark is to be apprehended in such a context. Upon naturalization, people who were formerly loyal to the principles of the German Basic Law would probably find no difficulty at all in accepting the values and principles of the Danish constitution, nor is there any reason to doubt that they would be fully loyal to their new country. The most pronounced differences between the two constitutional systems are the Danish monarchy and the official establishment of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Denmark; but even dedicated republicans and devout Catholics among the German immigrants would presumably be able to adjust, and develop a proper *Verfassungspatriotismus*.

In the first generation, German would probably remain the main language of most immigrants, though they would naturally become functional in Danish; their children born in Denmark would be far more likely to have a Danish accent in German than a German accent in Danish. When they started dating their 'ethnic' Danish counterparts, the concept of 'family honour' would not be an obstacle, in the case of girls, to their integration in this important

respect. 'Danish' and 'German' would not, under such a scenario, function as mutually exclusive terms, either culturally or, indeed, ethnically (due to presumably substantial rates of intermarriage), and the country would still be, for all the changes it will have undergone, unmistakably Danish.

No doubt, some German cultural distinctness would be preserved by many for a long time, and Danish culture and the Danish language itself would inevitably be influenced by such an influx; so much the better for Denmark and for the cause of diversity. Under such a scenario, no Danish 'ethnic majority', facing a German ethnic minority, should be expected to emerge in any strong and problematic sense. At any rate, it should not be expected to emerge permanently, as a result of the non-German people in Denmark feeling that their ethnic 'Danishness' is a distinctive feature of their identity not shared by a large and growing minority – an identity important enough for them and challenged enough by mass immigration to be in need of 'cultural defense', in Orgad's terms. The people in question would presumably, under such a scenario, react to German immigration in the spirit of what Christian Joppke says in his contribution to the present discussion: they would regard themselves as (primarily) not members of a 'group' but as 'individuals whose claims are protected by the liberal constitution of a strong and uncontested state', needing no 'special rights'.

Up to now, our conclusions have been entirely positive and optimistic, impeccably liberal and multicultural. Denmark can surely integrate a great many Germans in this way. But how many? The current population of the country is just over 5.5 million people. Many would assume that accepting millions of immigrants would in any case be a practical impossibility for such a country. They would be quite wrong. The state of Israel accepted, within less than a decade after its establishment, a number of immigrants almost twice as large as its original population. This, in the rather desperate conditions that prevailed in the country in its first years, caused huge difficulties, but the country not merely survived the experience: already in the 50s it was characterized by unusually rapid economic growth, obviously thanks, to a large extent, to the mass immigration. This clearly shows that mass immigration, even on a scale unimaginable for most people, can be not merely feasible but economically beneficial – provided that the parties involved have the right attitude. The level of economic and social development in Israel, when it was absorbing the mass immigration of its earlier years, was, needless to say, incomparably lower than that of Denmark today, and the country was spending a large part of its budget on defence. Most of the immigrants to Israel were much poorer than would be the case with a German immigration to Denmark – many of them were penniless.

Moreover, cultural gaps between the different groups within the emerging Israeli society were very considerable. Jews from Germany and, say, Yemen were in many respects more dissimilar, culturally, than Germans and Danes are today.* Religion, it is true, served to some extent as a unifying factor – but it also produced wide cultural and emotional gaps, and acute political conflicts. Few Germans and Danes today are as dissimilar, religiously, as radically secular and Orthodox (or ultra-Orthodox) Israeli Jews. Of course, the great majority of the people in question saw themselves, regardless of religiosity, as sharing the same peoplehood, as belonging to the Jewish people. But without dismissing the power of the idea of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish homeland – liberal democracy, multiculturalism, and European unity are powerful and attractive ideas too. So – is there any reason why Denmark would not be able and willing to integrate 10 million German immigrants, if we go by the Israeli precedent – or, at least, say, 5 million of them?

Of course, Israel not merely allowed mass Jewish immigration – it actively encouraged it. Denmark, on its part, would have no ideological motivation to do so. On the other hand, it has powerful demographic and economic reasons, as do other European countries with an aging population and low birth-rate, to encourage mass immigration – certainly in case of an entirely unproblematic and in many respects highly valuable sort of mass immigration described here. Why wouldn't Denmark be not merely prepared but eager, if such a thing were conceivable, to take 5, or at least 4 or 3 million German immigrants?

As a matter of fact, we all know that it would not be eager or willing to do any such thing. Long before such numbers of immigrants would be approached, the Danish people (a category that naturally includes many originally 'non-ethnic' Danes, now sufficiently integrated) would feel that their country would simply no longer be Denmark if German immigration on such a scale were allowed to continue. The issue of German immigration would become a central issue of Danish politics – first on the fringes, then in the mainstream. Eventually, no doubt, public opinion would force the politicians to put an end to mass immigration of Germans. ** By that time,

presumably, a large German minority in Denmark will have become a permanent – or at least a long-term – fact of Danish life. The question of its relations with the majority, in the framework of a liberal European state, would need to be addressed. This would not at all have to be a tragedy. This would, however, be a different Danish society. Providing liberal answers to the question of the relations between this minority and the majority would then require a kind of liberalism capable of adjusting to new realities, while adhering to its basic values.

But why would the Danes feel this way about mass German immigration (beyond a certain point), and would this feeling be a fundamentally legitimate one, in terms of liberal values? After all, Denmark, even if it took in millions, and even if ethnic (in the broad sense) Danes were to become a minority, would certainly still be Denmark in the civic and constitutional sense, and there is a powerful case for arguing that its economy, even if it had to suffer temporary difficulties, would soon become much more prosperous. And, of course, there would be no question of white prejudice, Islamophobia, or security concerns (justified or not) in such a situation. Many liberals, and perhaps especially German liberals, may perhaps tend to feel sympathy for a small nation anxious to avoid rampant Germanization. But it should be stressed that the Dutch can be fully expected to react in a similar way to British immigration on a similar scale.

I would submit that such a reaction would not at this point, in and of itself, be illiberal and xenophobic – though one should not doubt that once aroused, such feelings would often find expression in very problematic, and often downright xenophobic, ways. There is a point – not easily predictable beforehand, and perhaps very distant, but definitely existing in principle, and depending both on absolute numbers and on the pace of immigration – at which it would be reasonable for liberal Danes to feel that Denmark was being Germanized, rather than German immigration being successfully integrated. This, I would argue, would not mean that Danish liberals are betraying liberalism by endowing their ‘Danishness’ with some essentialist, inflexible and narrowly-ethnic meaning. It would be fundamentally understandable and legitimate in liberal terms, if ‘liberal’ means respecting the freedom and dignity of all human beings, and, as part of it, their need for cultural self-expression.

At some point of this process, there would indeed emerge, in Denmark, a Danish majority vis-a-vis a large German ethnic minority – perhaps, indeed, a large German national minority. There would indeed be two clearly distinct long-term groups facing each other. On a purely practical level, a classroom in which half of the students are of German-immigrant background can be expected to produce future German-origin Danish citizens of a very different kind – linguistically, and in a more general sense of culture, attitude and identity – than a classroom with only a couple of such pupils. There would be less need, and, naturally, less willingness, on the part of ethnic Germans, to integrate culturally – above all, in the sense of adopting Danish as their main language; indeed, those wishing to integrate would find it much more difficult to do so. And the willingness of the ‘host’ society to integrate – without insisting on full assimilation – would have been diminished. The relatively greater rigidity of both identities (without assuming that they would become fully impregnable) would be re-enforcing each other.

The most obvious answer to the question – in what sense, precisely, would the Danish character of Denmark be challenged, in the eyes of the majority – is that Denmark would cease to be an (overwhelmingly) Danish-speaking country. As has been argued above, Denmark can take in and integrate large numbers of German immigrants without producing this result (despite some degree linguistic pluralism that would inevitably emerge). Beyond a certain point, however, this would no longer be the case. Language is widely considered as the most fundamental cultural element of a modern national identity (in most cases) – however ‘civic’, as opposed to ethnic’, this identity may be, according the usual definitions. In France, whose national identity is described as civic *par excellence*, language is regarded as central to national identity perhaps more than in any other European democracy. It thus seems unproblematic to say that it matters a lot, to Danes, whether or not their country will continue to be overwhelmingly Danish speaking.

But the truth is that language, for all its importance, is not the whole story. The German-speaking cantons of Switzerland can be expected to react similarly to the prospect of several million German immigrants. The same would apply to the French-speaking cantons, or to Wallonia, in the face of French immigration on a similar scale – or to the Irish Republic (where English is spoken by a large majority) and even Scotland (both English-speaking, and, of course, part of the same state, with no legal way at all to oppose ‘internal’ immigration) should millions of English people wish, within a space of several years, to settle there. In all these cases, immigration on such a scale would be perceived as fundamentally transforming the cultural character of the country, even

without a change of language (and without any danger to the liberal constitutional order). The cultural differences involved, in these cases, may often seem trivial to outsiders. What is so Irish about Irish culture? Are Irish songs really so different from English ones, sung in the same language (though in a somewhat different accent)? But surely, if there is a liberal right to culture, it includes the right to attach importance to things that may seem trivial to outsiders. Only a very narrow-minded Irish nationalist indeed might wish to ban English songs from Ireland; but even a good Irish liberal would, presumably, balk at the idea of 5 million English immigrants, even if it could be expected that this would in fact be most beneficial to the Irish economy.

All this does not mean that, if a large and clearly distinct German minority were to emerge in Denmark a result of mass immigration, the liberal-democratic order would collapse or be gravely impaired, or that liberal principles would be no longer applicable. Nor does it mean that integration, in a significant (though changed) sense would no longer be possible. Tensions, probably acute for some time, may be expected eventually to subside, and reasonable accommodation found. We are, after all, talking about Denmark. But liberal principles would have to be interpreted and applied, in such a situation, in a way that takes account of greatly changed conditions; otherwise, the public might well lend its ear to what illiberal forces have to suggest. Once the existence of two (or more) sufficiently large cultural groups, sufficiently distinct from each other, becomes a long-term cultural reality, ignoring the cultural rights and legitimate claims of the majority simply means ignoring the rights and legitimate claims of a greater number of people. There seems to be no justification for this, as a matter of principle; nor is there any reason to expect, in a democracy, that the majority will allow such a thing to happen.

The ability of a highly-developed, 'strong and uncontested' liberal Western state to absorb large-scale immigration is one of the hallmarks of our contemporary world. But it should not be assumed that this ability does not depend, heavily, on the numbers involved, on the pace at which immigrants come, on cultural differences and on political circumstances. The extreme and unrealistic example of 'mega'-mass immigration, and its likely consequences, discussed here, does not, of course, provide anything like a precise answer to any real-life controversy as to the scope and conditions for immigration and naturalization, or the desirable cultural policies in countries of immigration. It does, however, in my view, show that numbers and cultural differences cannot be treated as simply immaterial in this context, and that immigration, at some point, is indeed capable of making the notion of majority and minority (or minorities) realistic and significant. The issue, raised in Orgad's book, of majority culture and majority identity, and their claims on the liberal state – alongside other and competing legitimate claims – may be expected to be, for a long time, an important issue in many Western societies. European liberalism may perhaps profit from some of the lessons on flexibility, and willingness to change, adapt and negotiate shifting boundaries, that it has been teaching the European nation state in the last decades. The core, in both cases – of European liberalism and of the European nation state – can be expected to survive, despite the changes. Both sides will be well advised to leave the core of the other side alone – if only because to a large extent, it overlaps with its own core. The last word in the long story of the relations between European liberalism and the European nation state has not been heard yet.

* See on this [Alexander Jakobson, 'A Jewish State, Multiculturalism, the Law of Return, and Non-Jewish Immigration'](#), in Anita Shapira et al. (eds.), [The Nation State and Immigration, The Age of Population Movements, \(Volume 3 of Contemporary Challenges to the Nation State: Global and Israeli Perspectives\)](#), Sussex Academic Press, Sussex 2014, 205 – 212; see also 212 – 216 on the Russian speaking immigration of the 90s.

** Cf. Azar Gat with Alexander Jakobson, [Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism](#), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, 351-352: 'no democratic electorate is likely to accept things [in the field of immigration] that it regards as fundamentally altering the national and cultural character of the state', though 'accumulated changes over a long period of time may sometimes produce a result that is much more far-reaching than anything that could have been anticipated, or would have been accepted, from the outset.' See 349 – 353; on immigration and national identity in contemporary West, especially Europe; cf. 261 – 264; 268 – 279; 328 – 378 on ethnic and civic aspects of Western national identities. It may be argued that the change in Danish society envisaged here is also in fact fundamental; the one that is described as politically inconceivable is, at any rate, fundamental in a more radical sense.

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